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9. — *The Authorship of Shakespeare.* By NATHANIEL HOLMES.
New York : Hurd and Houghton. 1866. Small 8vo. pp. xvi., 601.

BEFORE reading this last Missouri Report of Judge Holmes, we had supposed that the case embodied in it had been so fully argued in the court below, that not even feminine counsel would undertake a motion for a new trial. It had not been shown that Bacon had ever laid claim to the authorship of any works except those now published under his name; there was no evidence that Shakespeare had ever even hinted that he was not lawfully entitled to whatever fame the plays acted under his name might bring; and not a single contemporary of the two authors had ever doubted that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare, and Bacon, Bacon. As to the knowledge of law evident in the plays that go by Shakespeare's name, it was said that there was no need of supposing the author to have taken his first *gradus ad Parnassum* on a lawyer's stool, since terms of law long obsolete were familiar words in Lord Coke's time, and intricacies which are difficult now were then commonly understood. The feudal law of real property, now antique, was then flourishing, and its ordinary forms were necessarily known to many people who never studied them as a means of livelihood. Nor was it absolutely known that Shakespeare himself had not been a lawyer's apprentice.

But a still stronger argument, it was said, was to be found in the Essays of Lord Bacon. It was clear that the author of "The Tempest," whatever else he wrote, did not write these Essays. Not only that the thoughts in the two could not have come from the same mind, but the expression was so widely different that this dissimilarity alone would prove a difference of authorship. To read one Essay, the adherents of the old theory claimed, was enough to purge all doubt from the mind of any one.

But Judge Holmes, accustomed all his life to weigh evidence, and more than ever of late, since he has taken a seat on the bench, has come to a different conclusion. We cannot go through the long tunnel of testimony by which he reaches light, but can only mention one or two memorable side slits through which a ray comes to illumine the prevailing darkness. In the first place, he does not believe Shakespeare to have been a student of law, and thinks that there is clear proof that the author of the plays had studied it. For instance, he finds indisputable evidence, and in this agrees with the opinion which Lord Campbell expressed in his book on Shakespeare's legal acquirements, that the author of the grave-digger's scene in "Hamlet" must have been familiar with the celebrated case of *Hales v. Petit*, Plowden's R. 256; and throughout the plays finds evidence at every corner that their

author was so familiar with legal expressions, that he could use them with absolute accuracy. This is not conclusive as to the question whether Bacon wrote the plays, but belongs to the preliminaries introduced to show that Shakespeare did not. We reach something more positive further on. A man named Hogg, once on trial, implored Sir Nicholas Bacon to save his life, claiming that there was kindred between Hog and Bacon. "Ay," replied the judge, "you and I cannot be kindred except you be hanged; for Hog is not Bacon until it be well hanged." It does not at all surprise Judge Holmes to find this same jest in "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

"*Evans.* Accusativo, hing, hang, hog.

"*Quick.* Hang hog is Latin for bacon, I warrant you."

Act IV. Sc. 1.

Such twin-like similarities are found elsewhere with equal ease. In "The Advancement of Learning," Bacon says, "Prophecy is but divine history; which hath that prerogative over human, as the narration may be before the fact as well as after." In Macbeth, Act III. Sc. 1, the same view of prophecy is introduced in these words:—

"*Macb.* He chid the sisters
When first they put the name of king upon me,
And bade them speak to him; then, prophet-like,
They hailed him father to a line of kings.
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding."

But all this is merely internal evidence; and though a great deal of the same kind is to be easily found, it may fail to convince those who think all the direct proof points the other way. There is direct proof too, however. A letter, written by Mr. Tobie Matthew at some time subsequent to the 27th of January, 1621 (the exact date is unknown), was barbed with a postscript as pointed as it was short. "P. S. The most prodigious wit that ever I knew of my nation, and of this side of the sea, is of your Lordship's name, though he be known by another." To those who are reminded by this postscript of a well-known letter which caused great trouble in the case of *Bardell v. Pickwick*, it is enough to say with Judge Holmes, "Now, who else but this same Shakespeare could have been considered by Mr. Matthew to be a cover for the most prodigious wit of all England at that day?"

Before reading this argument, as we before said, it seemed to us impossible to believe that the author of Bacon's Essays could have written "Hamlet" or "Macbeth." But in wandering through Judge Holmes's pages, meeting here a strange identity of expression, here a curious

similarity of thought, the mind, however well trained in literary orthodoxy, begins to

“First endure, then pity, then embrace.”

And the best of it is that, after one cordial embrace, the most friendly feeling springs up between author and reader. The newt's eye, the frog's toe, the bat's wool, and the dog's tongue in the witches' caldron call to mind some half-forgotten passage from the *Sylva Sylvarum*; we find the same philosophical theory in the *De Augmentis* and Yorick's skull. In Falstaff's jests we have reminders of the Essay on Truth, and Mrs. Quickly recalls that on Marriage and Single Life. Fine vistas of strictly new and original fancy are opened, — whether Plato was not written by Aristotle, whether Frederick the Great was not the author of the works of Voltaire, whether Mill does not write Tennyson, or Tennyson does not write Mill. “Forsooth,” as Judge Holmes would say, this is matter of interest, and for our part we are ready to admit that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, unless, indeed, Shakespeare wrote Bacon.

10. — *The Life and Letters of JAMES GATES PERCIVAL.* By JULIUS H. WARD. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1866. 12mo. pp. xiv., 583.

THIS is an interesting and in many respects instructive book. Mr. Ward has done his work, as is fitting, in a loving spirit; and if he over-estimates both what Percival was and what he did, he enables us to form our own judgment by letting him so far as possible speak for himself. The book gives a rather curious picture of what the life of a man of letters is likely to be in a country not yet ripe for literary production, especially if he be not endowed with the higher qualities which command and can wait for that best of all successes which comes slowly. In a generation where everybody can write verses, and where certain modes of thought and turns of phrase have become so tyrannous that it is as hard to distinguish between the productions of one minor poet and another as among those of so many Minnesingers or Troubadours, there is a demand for only two things, — for what chimes with the moment's whim of popular sentiment and is forgotten when that has changed, or for what is never an anachronism, because it slakes or seems to slake the eternal thirst of our nature for those ideal waters that glimmer before us and still before us in ever-renewing mirage. Percival met neither of these conditions. With a nature singularly unplastic, unsympathetic, and self-involved, he was incapable of receiving into his own mind the ordinary emotions of men and giv-